



Streisand, Beatty, Sedgwick Glamorize L.A.'s Meteoric Art Fair

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By Michael Janofsky

Jan. 29 (Bloomberg) -- On the opening night of the [Los Angeles Art Show](#) last week, New York gallery owner Vincent Vallarino stood before a 1926 oil by French cubist Jean Metzinger that he hoped to sell for \$750,000.

“Someone is going to buy this,” Vallarino declared. “I just have a feeling.”

An hour later, the deal was done. A private collector whom he declined to identify bought the intensely hued abstract “La Roulette,” making it one of the highest-priced works to sell during a five-day show that is striving to become the best in the U.S.

While it still lacks the power and panache of the [Armory Show](#) in New York or [ArtBasel](#) in Miami Beach, the annual Los Angeles Art Show returned bigger than ever, with a wide range of styles and prices, and the largest crowds since the fair started 14 years ago.

As the event ended yesterday at Santa Monica Airport (its home for the last four years), fair producer Kim Martindale said that projected sales could reach \$30 million.

Martindale said that's double the 2006 total, when 52 galleries participated. There were 81 exhibitors this year, and some have already requested more space next time.

“We may have to move to find a bigger place to hold it,” Martindale said.

The popularity of the Los Angeles fair reflects a rapidly growing community of artists in the area, as well as a recent explosion of new galleries from Long Beach to Santa Barbara. Beyond that, the real estate and the entertainment industries have made so many people rich that six- and seven-figure works are attracting ever more suitors.

Art-Hungry Stars

This year's show drew dozens of celebrities, including Barbra Streisand, Warren Beatty, Annette Bening, Roseanne Barr, Kyra Sedgwick, Kevin Bacon, Jacqueline Bisset, Candy Spelling, Robert Downey Jr. and the guy who played Steve in “Sex and the City.”

For them and perhaps others, the [Henry Moore](#) sculpture of a reclining woman (\$5 million) and [Wayne Thiebaud's](#) 2006 colorful acrylic of a freeway at rush hour (about \$2 million) seemed worth considering. Neither was sold at the event.

But this was not a show that specialized in sought-after major works by notable artists, one measure of how distant Los Angeles remains from the premier centers of the international art world. Another is the show's distinctly domestic flavor: All but two exhibitors -- one from Canada, another from New Zealand -- were based in the U.S., most of them in New York or California.

Going International

“The goal is to continue to expand,” Martindale said. “Next year, I'm hoping we have some

international exhibitors. A lot of galleries from Europe came this year to look."

For certain buyers, this year offered an impressive array of California landscapes and a wide choice in contemporary and modern painting and sculpture.

It also served as a showcase for lesser-known artists, such as Kathryn Siegler of San Francisco, known for her renderings of everyday objects such as a tin of talcum powder and a box of matches. An acrylic of an American flag under a cash register showing "No Sale" had a price tag of \$15,000, the most expensive of her eight paintings.

"Definitely a political statement," she said, declining to elaborate. "Wouldn't want to scare off any buyers."

Based on this year's sales, many exhibitors said they were eager to see the fair expand. Whitney H. Ganz, director of William A. Karges Fine Art in Beverly Hills, which offered a large number of six-figure California landscapes, said: "Selling 10 would have been reasonable, and selling 15 would have been really great. We sold 20."

New Collectors

George Stein, whose galleries in West Hollywood and Carmel specialize in California impressionism and American-scene paintings, said he sold seven works, four to new collectors.

"Every year, the word is getting around more," he said. "I'm very optimistic with the trends I've seen. If this continues the way it has been going, it'll really become a major show in the United States."

([Michael Janofsky](#) is a reporter for Bloomberg News. The opinions expressed are his own.)

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